

ADMINISTRATIVE REMOVAL

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Seattle, Washington 98195

Institute for Environmental Studies

10 August 1983

Memorandum for Regional Administrator

Subject: Suggestions for 10 August Arsenic Standard Workshop

Although I had to leave early from the "dry run" of the presentations for the Vashon Island workshop I did form some impressions of the talks by Betty Anderson and Robert Ajax. These prompt me to make some suggestions for this and future workshops.

Both talks and -- to a lesser degree -- the introductory comments you made at the outset transmit more information than the medium can handle. The lecture-hall setting is an ambivalent one: the verbal and visual messages from the lecturer are only a small part of the stimuli. Other messages, including nonverbal body language, syntax and tone, and degree of distraction from projection equipment, compete with the verbal message for salience. While the smoothness of delivery may be improved substantially (Mr. Ajax' talk was already very good except for length), it is worth reflecting on the ensemble of messages that EPA means to project at the workshops.

To reformulate my earlier memo to Ed Coate and others, I believe the workshops need to communicate several explicit and implicit agency and personal messages:

- What the process aims at: the Administrator's responsibilities; the procedural and substantive content of the Sec. 112 rulemaking.
- There is substantial technical uncertainty in the scientific data (risk assessment) and in the engineering data on control (risk management).
- There is no doubt that arsenic can be harmful. EPA believes that arsenic is harmful at any level of exposure, however low.
- Concrete improvements are required in the proposed standard, but their expected benefits will not be observable in the statistics. This is one reason why EPA needs comments on its interpretation of "ample margin of safety to public health."

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- We are not asking you, now or in the hearings, to balance jobs versus health risks for us. That is the Administrator's responsibility as we interpret Sec. 112. We are interested in what you have to say about this question. But remember that those who benefit economically from the smelter are not the same as those exposed to the health risks. This is one of the reasons why a public official must draw the balance. Moreover, we believe that the cost of compliance with the proposed standard will not eliminate any jobs at Asarco-Tacoma.
- Our task is to protect public health as required in Sec. 112. We don't expect everyone to agree with us. We do expect to listen carefully to any objections or comments offered.
- I am a technical specialist committed to EPA. It's a job, but one I believe in both professionally and personally.
- I am willing to listen and to answer to my best ability. I am friendly.
- I am not the ultimate decision maker, but I am doing my darnedest to give him my best advice.

This is a lot to communicate; much of the information transfer, narrowly defined, must take place through documents such as the notice in the Federal Register. The implicit, value-laden messages toward the end of my list are critical for the workshop.

These observations lead me to suggest that the formal presentations by EPA staff have a rather different goal than the one I inferred on 9 August: to introduce the EPA staff member as a person and as a substantive expert. In a brief presentation an expert can do more than establish credibility. (In my opening lecture I try chiefly to attract the student back to the second lecture -- partly by telling him what to expect from the course, including what I expect from him.)

Such an approach would

- describe the problem areas in which the staff member is expert and experienced;
- include an opportunity for statements of personal experience: a reminiscence of field work at the Asarco smelter, or recollection of how one came to work at EPA, or a portrayal from the staff member's personal point of

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view of the challenge facing the Administrator. It would not concentrate on a summary of the substantive knowledge spelled out in the Federal Register.

There is not much time to realign the talks. My suggestions may not seem constructive to experienced public officials. But the NESHAPS rulemaking breaks new ground: it asks for a level of pedagogy from EPA which in itself announces the seriousness with which the agency will listen to citizens. I suggest here that in a public workshop pedagogical excellence must go considerably beyond high-speed transmission of complex ideas and data.

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